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Monday 22 May 1978

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[] By setting a date for withdrawal, however, Israel has relieved considerable diplomatic pressure and has improved the chances for resuming direct peace negotiations with Egypt. It is virtually impossible for President Sadat to justify to his people the resumption of peace talks as long as Israeli forces remain in Lebanon. []

EGYPT: Referendum Results

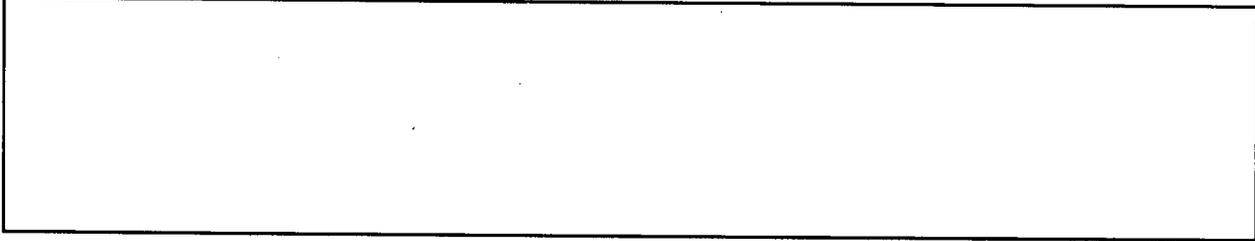
[] *Egypt's voters predictably answered "yes" yesterday to President Sadat's proposal to "purify" Egypt's political life. The voting on his referendum containing six principles governing political behavior was not marred by violence. The main question remaining is how harshly Sadat will apply his mandate.*

[] The outcome was never in doubt, only the margin of approval. More sophisticated Egyptians will regard the near unanimous approval with skepticism, particularly in light of the smashing victory by the government's candidate in the hotly contested parliamentary by-election in Alexandria on 17 May. The left candidate received only a handful of votes, although attendance at political rallies and political activity indicated a much closer election.

[] Many see the heavy hand of Prime Minister Salim both in the by-election and in Sadat's decision to clean house. A left party parliamentarian and 19 others were arrested during the campaigning in Alexandria for distributing pamphlets attacking the government. Just before the referendum, the secretary to left party leader Khalid Muhyi al-Din was arrested for distributing leaflets criticizing the vote; security officials, and Sadat himself, see a Soviet hand in such agitation, and this alleged foreign connection is the basis for their attack on the left.

[] Sadat's more narrow assault on rightist leader Siraj al-Din and his old guard supporters--but not the New Wafd Party

itself--stems from their personal challenge to Sadat's political preeminence and their questioning of the honesty of his family and closest confidants.



It is not likely that Sadat will carry out a broad and sustained shakeup of the political system at this time. Government spokesmen have been quick to deny that the referendum represents any fundamental retreat from "political liberalization." After removing specific targets among his critics, Sadat will probably rely more on the threat of his new laws than on their application to keep opponents in line. This was the pattern of his response to the urban riots in January 1977.

Leftist and Wafd leaders could, of course, still attempt to derail Sadat's plans by provoking a confrontation. Their ability to do so will depend on whether they make common cause in the name of protecting democracy in Egypt and whether they successfully link their cause to the innumerable economic and social grievances of Egypt's urban masses.

